



SATURDAY, AUGUST 7, 1909

Dickie stood seemingly helpless. McCloud slipped his finger into his waistcoat pocket and held something out in his hand. "This shell pin fell from your hair that night you were at camp by the bridge—do you remember? I couldn't bear to give it back."

"Dickie's eyes opened wide. 'Let me see it. I don't think that is mine.' 'Great heaven! Have I been carrying Marion Sinclair's pin for a month?' exclaimed McCloud. 'Well, I won't lose any time in returning it to her, at any rate.'"

"Where are you going?" Dickie's voice was faint.

"I'm going to give Marion her pin."

"Do nothing of the sort! Come here! Give it to me."

"Dickie, dare you tell me, after a shock like that, it really is your pin?"

"Oh, I don't know whose pin it is!"

"Give me the pin!" She put her hands unsteadily up under her hat.

"Here, for heaven's sake, if you must have something, take this comb!" She slipped from her head the shell that held her knotted hair. He caught her hand and kissed it, and she could not get it away.

"You are dear," murmured Dickie.

"If you are silly. The reason I wouldn't let you ride home with me is because I was afraid you might get shot. How do you suppose I should feel if you were killed? Or, don't you think I have any feeling?"

"But Dickie, is it all right?"

"How do I know? What do you mean? I will not let you ride home with me, and you will not let me ride home alone. Tie Jim again. I am going to stay with Marion all night."

CHAPTER XXX.

The Laugh of a Woman.

Within an hour, Marion, working over a hat in the trimming room, was startled to hear the cottage door open and to see Dickie, quite unconcerned, walk in. To Marion's exclamation of surprise she returned only a laugh. "I have changed my mind, dear. I am going to stay all night."

Marion kissed her approvingly.

"Really, you are getting so sensible. I don't know you, Dickie. In fact, I believe this is the most sensible thing you were ever guilty of."

"Glad you think so," returned Dickie, dryly, unpinning her hat; "certainly hope it is. Mr. McCloud persuaded me it wasn't right for me to ride home alone, and I knew better than he what danger there was for him in riding home with me—so here I am. He is coming over for supper, too, in a few minutes."

When McCloud arrived he brought with him a portmanteau, and Marion was again driven from the kitchen. At the end of an hour, Dickie, engrossed over the broiler, was putting the finishing touches to the steak, and McCloud, more engrossed, was watching her, when a diffident and surprised-looking person appeared in the kitchen doorway and put his hand undecidedly on the casing. While he stood, Dickie turned abruptly to McCloud.

"Oh, by the way, I have forgotten something! Will you do me a favor?"

"Certainly! Do you want money or a pass?"

"No, not money," said Dickie, lifting the steak on her fork, "though you might give me a pass."

"But I should hate to have you go away anywhere—"

"I don't want to go anywhere, but I never had a pass, and I think it would be kind of nice to have one just to keep. Don't you?"

"Why, yes; you might put it in the bank and have it drawing interest."

"This steak is—Do they give interest on passes?"

"Well, a good deal of interest is felt in them—on this division at least. What is the favor?"

"Yes, what is it? How can I think? Oh, I know! If they don't put Jim in a box stall to-night he will kill some of the horses over there. Will you telephone the stables?"

"Won't you give me the number and let me telephone?" asked a voice behind them. They turned in astonishment and saw Whispering Smith. "I am surprised," he added, calmly, "to see a man of your intelligence, George, trying to broil a steak with the lower door of your stove wide open. Close the lower door and cut out the draft through the fire. Don't stare, George; put back the broiler. And haven't you made a radical mistake to start with?" he asked, stepping between the confused couple. "Are you not trying to broil a roast of beef?"

"Where did you come from?" demanded McCloud, as Marion came in from the dining room.

"Don't search me the very first thing," protested Whispering Smith.

"But we've been frightened to death here for 24 hours. Are you really alive and unharmed? This young lady rode in 20 miles this morning and came to the office in tears to get news of you."

Smith looked mildly at Dickie. "Did you shed a tear for me? I should like to have seen just one! Where did I come from? I reported in wild over the telephone ten minutes ago. Didn't Marion tell you? She is so forgetful. That is what causes wrecks, Marion. I have been in the saddle since three o'clock this morning, thank you, and have had nothing for five days but raw steer garnished with sunshine."

The four sat down to supper, and Whispering Smith began to talk. He told the story of the chase to the Cache, the defiance from Rebstock, and the lady's appearance of the moon he wanted. "Du Sang meant to shoot his way through us and make a dash

for it. There really was nothing else for him to do. Banks and Kennedy were up above, even if he could have ridden out through the upper canyon, which is very doubtful with all the water now. After a little talk back and forth, Du Sang drew, and of course then it was every man for himself. He was hit twice and he died."

Sunday night, but the other two were not seriously hurt. What can you do? It is either kill or get killed with those fellows, and, of course, I talked plainly to Du Sang. He had butchered a man at Mission Springs just the night before, and deserved hanging a dozen times over. He meant from the start, he told me afterward, to get me. Oh, Miss Dunning, may I have some more coffee? Haven't I an agreeable part of the railroad business, don't you think? I shouldn't have pushed in here to-night, but I saw the lights when I rode by awhile ago; they looked so good I couldn't resist."

McCloud leaned forward. "You call it pushing in, do you, Gordon? Do you know what this young lady did this morning? One of her cowboys came down from the Cache early with the word that you had been killed in the fight by Du Sang. He said he saw you drop from your saddle to the ground with Du Sang shooting at you. She ordered up her horse, without a word, and rode 20 miles in an hour and a half to find out here what we had heard. She 'pushed in' at the Wicklow, where she never had been before in her life, and wandered through it alone looking for my office, to find out from me whether I hadn't something to contradict the bad news. While we talked, in came your dispatch from Sleepy Cat. Never was one better timed! And when she knew you were safe her eyes filled again."

Whispering Smith looked at Dickie, quizzically. Her confusion was delightful. He rose, lifted her hand in his own, and bending, kissed it.

They talked till late, and when Dickie walked on the porch McCloud followed to smoke. Whispering Smith still sat at the table talking to Marion, and the two heard the sound of the low voices outside. At intervals Dickie's laugh came in through the open door.

Whispering Smith, listening, said nothing for some time, but once she laughed peculiarly. He picked up his ears. "What has been happening since I left town?"

"What do you mean?" asked Marion.

He nodded toward the porch. "McCloud and Dickie out there. They have been fixing things up."

"Nonsense! What do you mean?"

"I mean they are engaged."

"Never in the world!"

"I may be slow in reading a trail," said Smith, modestly, "but when a woman laughs like that I think there's something doing. Don't you believe it? Call them in and ask them. You won't? Well, I will. Take them in separate rooms. You ask her and I'll ask him."

In spite of Marion's protests the two were brought in. "I am required by Mr. Smith to ask you a very silly question, Dickie," said Marion, taking her into the living room. "Answer yes or no. Are you engaged to anybody?"

"What a question! Why, no!"

"Marion Sinclair wants to know just one thing, George," said Whispering Smith to McCloud, after he had taken him into the dark shop. "She feels she ought to know because she is in a way Dickie's chaperone, you know, and she feels that you are illing she should know. I don't want to be too serious, but answer yes or no. Are you engaged to Dickie?"

"Why, yes, I—"

"That's all; go back to the porch," directed Whispering Smith. McCloud obeyed orders.

Marion, alone in the living room, was waiting for the inquirer, and her face wore a look of triumph. "You are not such a mind-reader after all, are you? I told you they weren't."

"I told you they were," contended Whispering Smith.

"She says they are not," insisted Marion.

"He says they are," returned Whispering Smith. "And, what's more, I'll bet my saddle against the shop they are. I could be mistaken in anything but that laugh."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A Midnight Visit.

The lights, but one, were out. McCloud and Whispering Smith had gone, and Marion was looking up the house for the night, when she was halted by a knock at the shop door. It was a summons that she thought she knew, but the last in the world that she wanted to hear or to answer. Dickie had gone to the bedroom, and standing between the portieres that curtained the workroom from the shop, Marion in the half-light listened, hesitating whether to ignore or to answer the midnight intruder. But experience, and bitter experience, had taught her there was only one way to meet that particular summons, and that was to act, whether at noon or at midnight, without fear. She waited until the knocking had been twice repeated, then she opened the door. A man stood before her, and she drew back with her hand to enter. "Dickie Dunning is with me to-night," said Marion, with her hand on the latch, "and we shall have to talk here."

Sinclair took off his hat. "I knew you had company," he returned in the low, gentle tone that Marion knew very well, "so I came late. And I heard to-night, for the first time, that this railroad crowd is after me—God knows why; but they have to earn their salary somehow. I want to keep out of trouble if I can. I won't kill anybody if they don't force me to it. They're scared nearly all my men away from the ranch already; one crippled-up cowboy is all I have got to help me look after the cattle. But I won't quarrel with them, Marion. If I can get away from here peacefully, so I've come to talk to you once more with you. I'm going away and I want you to go with me; I've got enough to keep us as well as the best of them and as long as we live. You've given me a good lesson. I needed it, didn't I?"

"Don't call me that!"

He laughed kindly. "Why, that's what it used to be; that's what I want it to be again. I don't blame you. You're worth all the women I ever knew, Marion. I've learned to appreciate some few things in the lonely months I've spent up on the Frenchman; but I've felt while I was there as if I were working for both of us. I've got a buyer in sight now for the cattle and the land. I'm ready to clean up and say good-by to trouble—all I want is for you to give me the one chance I've asked for and go along."

They stood facing each other under the dim light. She listened intently to every word, though in her terror she might not have heard or understood all of them. One thing she did very clearly understand, and that was why he had come and what he wanted. To that she held her mind tenaciously, and for that she shaped her answer. "I cannot go with you—now or ever."

He waited a moment. "We always got along, Marion, when I behaved myself."

"I hope you always will behave yourself; but I could no more go with you than I could make myself again what I was years ago, Murray. I wish you nothing but good; but our ways parted long ago."

"Stop and think a minute, Marion. I offer you more and offer it more honestly than I ever offered it before, because I know myself better. I am alone in the world—strong, and better able to care for you than I was when I undertook to—"

"I have never complained."

"That's what makes me more anxious to show you now that I can and will do what's right."

"Oh, you multiply words! It is too late for you to be here. You are in danger, you say, for the love of heaven, leave me and go away!"

"You know me, Marion, when my mind is made up, I won't leave without you." He leaned with one hand against the ribbon showcase. "If you don't want to go I will stay right here and pay off the scores I owe. Two men have stirred this country up too long, anyway. I don't care much how soon anybody gets me after I round them up. But to-night I felt like this: You and I started out in life together, and we ought to live it out or die together, whether it's to-night, Marion, or 20 years from to-night."

"If you want to kill me to-night, I have no resistance to make."

Sinclair sat down on a low counter-stool, and, bending forward, held his head between his hands. "It oughtn't all to end here. I know you, and I know you want to do what's right. I couldn't kill you without killing myself; you know that." He straightened up slowly. "Here!" He slipped his revolver from his hip-pocket and held the grip of the gun toward her. "Use it on me if you want to. It is your chance to end everything; it may save several lives if you do. I won't leave McCloud here to crow over me, and, by God, I won't leave you here for Whispering Smith! I'll settle with him anyhow. Take the pistol! What are you afraid of? Take it! Use it! I don't want to live without you. If you make me do it, you're to blame for the consequences."

She stood with wide-open eyes, but uttered no word.

"You won't touch it—then you care a little for me yet," he murmured.

"No! Do not say so. But I will not do murder."

"Think about the other, then. Go with me and everything will be all right. I will come back some evening soon for my answer. And until then, if those two men have any use for life,

let them keep in the clear. I heard to-night that Du Sang is killed. Do you know whether it is true?"

"It is true."

An oath half escaping showed how the confirmation cut him. "And Whispering Smith got away! It is Du Sang's own fault; I told him to keep out of that trap. I stay in the open; and I'm not Du Sang. I'll choose my own ground for the finish when they want it with me, and when I go I'll take company—I'll promise you that. Good-night, Marion. Will you shake hands?"

"No."

"Damn it, I like your grit, girl! Well, good-night, anyway."

She closed the door. She had even strength enough to bolt it before his footsteps died away. She put out the light and felt her way blindly back to the workroom. She staggered through it, clutching at the curtains, and fell in the darkness into Dickie's arms.

"Marion, dear, don't speak," Dickie whispered. "I heard everything. Oh, Marion!" she cried, suddenly conscious of the inertness of the burden in her arms. "Oh, what shall I do?"

Moved by fright to her utmost strength, Dickie drew the unconscious woman back to her room and managed to lay her on the bed. Marion opened her eyes a few minutes later to see the light of the telephone bell ringing and to find Dickie on the edge of the bed beside her.

"Oh, Marion, thank heaven, you're living! I have been frightened to death. Don't mind the telephone; it is Mr. McCloud. I didn't know what to do, so I telephoned him."

"But you had better answer him," said Marion, faintly. The telephone bell was ringing wildly.

"Oh, no! he can wait. How are you, dear? I don't wonder you were frightened to death. Marion, he means to kill us—every one!"

"No, Dickie. He will kill me and kill himself; that is where it will end. Dickie, do answer the telephone. What are you thinking of? Mr. McCloud will be at the door in five minutes. Do you want him in the street to-night?"

Dickie fled to the telephone, and an excited conference over the wire closed in seeming reassurance at both ends. By that time Marion had regained her steadiness, but she could not talk of what had passed. At times, as the two lay together in the darkness, Marion spoke, but it was not to be answered. "I do not know," she murmured once wearily. "Perhaps I am doing wrong; perhaps I ought to go with him. I wish, oh, I wish I knew what I ought to do!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

The Call.

Beyond receiving reports from Kennedy and Banks, which in the interval rode into town and rode out again, on their separate and silent ways, Whispering Smith for two days seemed to do nothing. Yet distinct keener than silence kept the people of Medicine Bend on edge during those two days, and when President Bucks' car came in on the evening of the second day, the town knew from current rumors that Banks had gone to the Frenchman ranch with a warrant on a serious charge for Sinclair. In the president's car Bucks and McCloud, after a late dinner, were joined by Whispering Smith, and the president heard the first connected story of the events of the fortnight that had passed. Bucks made no comment until he had heard everything. "And they shot Sinclair's horses," he said in conclusion.

"Sinclair's horses," returned Whispering Smith, "and they are all accounted for. One horse supplied by Rebstock was shot where they crossed Stampede creek. It had given out and they had a fresh horse in the willows, for they shot the scrub half a mile up one of the canyons near the crossing. The mares attracted my attention to it. A piece of skin a foot square had been cut out of the flank."

"You got there before the birds."

"It was about an even thing," said Smith. "Anyhow, we were there in time to see the horse."

"And Sinclair was away from the ranch from Saturday noon till Sunday night?"

"A rancher living over on Stampede creek saw the five men when they crossed Saturday afternoon. The fellow was scared and fled to me about it, but he told Wickwire who they were."

"Now, who is Wickwire?" asked Bucks.

"You ought to remember Wickwire, George," remarked Whispering Smith, turning to McCloud. "You haven't forgotten the Smoky creek wreck? Do you remember the tramp who had his legs crushed and lay in the sun all morning? You put him in your car and sent him down here to the railroad hospital and Barnhardt took care of him. That was Wickwire. Not a bad fellow, either; he can talk pretty straight and shoot pretty straight. How do I know? Because he has told me the story and I've seen him shoot. There, you see, is one friend that I never reckoned on. He used to be a cowboy, and I got him a job working for Sinclair on the Frenchman. He has worked at Dunning's and other places on the Crawling Stone. He hates Sinclair with a deadly hatred for some reason. Just lately Wickwire set up for himself on Little Crawling Stone."

"I have noticed that fellow's ranch," remarked McCloud.

"I couldn't leave him at Sinclair's," continued Whispering Smith, frankly. "The fellow was on my mind all the time. I felt certain he would kill Sinclair or get killed if he stayed there. And then, when I took him away they sprang Tower W on me! That is the price, not of having a conscience, for I haven't any, but of listening to the voice that echoes where my conscience used to be," said the railroad man, moving uneasily in his chair.

Bucks broke the ash from his cigar into the tray on the table. "You are restless to-night, Gordon—and it isn't like you, either."

"It is in the air. There has been a dead calm for two days. Something is due to happen to-night. I wish I could hear from Banks; he started with the papers for Sinclair's yesterday while I went to Oroville to sweat Karg. Blood-poisoning has set in and it is rather important to us to get a confession. There's a horse!" He stepped to the window. "Coming fast, too. Now, I wonder—no, he's gone by."

Five minutes later a messenger came to the car from the Wickup with word that Kennedy was looking for Whispering Smith. Bucks, McCloud and Smith left the car together and walked up to McCloud's office.

Kennedy, sitting on the edge of the table, was tapping his leg nervously with a ruler. "Bad news, Gordon."

"Not from Ed Banks?"

"Sinclair got him this morning."

Whispering Smith sat down. "Go on."

"Banks and I picked up Wickwire on the Crawling Stone early, and we rode over to the Frenchman. Wickwire said Sinclair had been up at Williams Cache the day before, and he didn't think he was home. Of course I knew the Cache was watched and he wouldn't be there long, so Ed asked me to stay in the cottonwoods and watch the creek for him. He and Wickwire couldn't find anybody home when they got to the ranchhouse and they rode down the corral together to look over the horses. Wickwire was looking for Sinclair's horse, and he found it. He rode down to the house."

"Sinclair rode out from behind the

barn and hit Wickwire in the arm before they saw him. Banks turned and opened on him, and Wickwire ducked for the creek. Sinclair put a soft bullet through Banks' shoulder—tore it pretty bad, Gordon—and made his getaway before Wickwire and I could reach the barn again. I got Ed on his horse and back to Wickwire's, and we sent one of the boys to Oroville for a doctor. After Banks fell out of the saddle and was helpless Sinclair talked to him before I came up. 'You ought to have kept out of this, Ed,' he said. 'This is a railroad fight. Why didn't they send the head of their own gang, after me?'—naming you." Kennedy nodded toward Whispering Smith.

"Naming me?"

"Banks says: 'I'm sheriff of this county, and will be a long time yet!' I took the papers from his breast pocket," continued Kennedy. "You can see where he was hit." Kennedy laid the sheriff's packet on the table. Bucks drew his chair forward and, with his cigar between his fingers, picked the packet up and opened it. Kennedy went on: "Ed told Sinclair if he couldn't land him himself that he knew a man who could and would before he was a week older. He meant you, Gordon, and the last thing Ed told me was that he wanted you to serve the papers on Sinclair."

A silence fell on the company. One of the documents passing under Bucks' hand caught his eye and he opened it. It was the warrant for Sinclair. He read it without comment, folded it, and, looking at Whispering Smith, pushed it toward him. "Then this, I guess, Gordon, belongs to you."

Starting from a reverie, Whispering Smith reached for the warrant. He looked for a moment at the blood-stained caption. "Yes," he said, "this, I guess, belongs to me."

(To Be Continued.)

SUFFERING.

Release my hands she said to him. As they stood in the entry way. It was night, dark night where he stood with her.

And nothing the youth did say. And Release my hands she said again. But he would not let them go. And he said things in her scowl ear. In a throatful voice and low:

"Oh, release my hands!" screamed the maid to him.

But he wouldn't, alas! slack. "Well, if you won't," shrieked the maid at last.

"Then, damn it all! scratch my back!"

Depew Inherits Talkativeness.

"My father," said Chauncey M. Depew, "was a frugal and saving man. He never approved of the waste of anything, including time."

"One night he went to a prayer meeting. The brethren were backward. After a wait of a quarter of an hour my father rose and said: 'It is a shame to waste all this valuable time. Will not some brother tell his experience?'"

"No one rose and my father continued: 'Will some one lead us in prayer?'"

"There was no response to this appeal and my father said: 'In that case I will improve the time by making a few observations on the tariff.'"

—New York Sun.

Embarrassed Mules.

One of the humorous passages in Mark Twain's "A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court," relates how a party of travelers, composed of ladies and gentlemen, were telling funny stories and how the Yankee was able to trace the progress of the joke down the cavalcade by the way the mules blushed.

The idea of a mule blushing at anything, even the Salome dance, in these times is of course preposterous. The embarrassment of those early mules was a fitting rebuke to the ladies aboard the mules, for we are led to infer that the ladies didn't blush.

He's Famous Now.

"Some people work years in vain to become famous and others win fame in a single day."

"Right you are. There is the case of that Ohio man who traded his wife for a keg of beer."

FOR HIS SAKE.

"He hasn't enough sense to get in out of the rain."

"Is that why his wife is so anxious to move to Arizona?"

Slightly Qualified.

"A woman's as old as she looks."

"This saying you don't doubt—As old as she looks, that is."

Before she is dressed to go out!

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